



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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LONE LOUISIANA WHOOPING CRANE HELI-CAUGHT AND MOVED TO TEXAS

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is making an effort to find a mate for a lonely Louisiana whooping crane that recently took up residence in Texas — after being chased down by helicopters in Louisiana and forcibly removed to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge near Corpus Christi, Texas. This task was undertaken by the Service in an effort to save from extinction the 37 whooping cranes that represent the world's total population of the bird.

With the population of the whooping crane at such a low level, every surviving member of the crane family should be in production, in the opinion of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Now that the lonely bird from Louisiana has been introduced to its kind in Texas, it is hoped that it will help perpetuate its species.

The Louisiana crane is the sole survivor of 12 whooping cranes that have lived on lands of the Stanolind Oil Corporation near Vermilion, Louisiana, during the last 15 years. One by one the others died. Several schemes had been advanced to introduce the survivor to the three dozen whooping cranes that winter at Aransas, but not until March 11 did anything succeed. Using two helicopters belonging to the Petroleum Bell Company, the Fish and Wildlife Service, with the cooperation of two representatives of the National Audubon Society, herded the big whooper over a lake. With the powerful downdraft of the helicopters' rotors forcing the bird to land in the water, the FWS and Audubon men were able to land with the float-equipped helicopter and take the whooper aboard.

With its nearly seven-foot wings and three-foot legs folded up, the bird was placed in a sack and flown to the airport at nearby Lafayette. From there it was driven to Aransas by car. After a little exercise, the once lonely bird was introduced to other whoopers. Someday, the Service hopes to return the Louisiana crane — with numerous sons and daughters — to its broad expanse of marsh near Vermilion.

The whooping crane is the country's tallest bird, standing over four feet at normal posture and over six feet on tiptoe — with its long neck outstretched in its characteristic whooping call. A white bird with black wing tips and a red-fronted face, the whooping is a beautiful sight soaring on its huge wings. Few people get close to the whooping crane, however, as it likes solitude.

The protection of the whooping crane was a primary consideration in the acquisition of the Aransas Refuge in 1937. The isolation and primitive nature of this 47,261-acre area is essential for the birds' survival. The whooping cranes migrate north in late March or early April to an unknown breeding ground in the arctic. Three to six young birds are reared in the arctic every year and appear at Aransas with the flock of old birds in the fall. Because deaths of old birds do not quite equal the production of young, a gradual increase in the Texas whooping crane population has been noted during the last 10 or 15 years.